

# New mileage standards may burden boaters

By Frank Sargeant,  
*[Editor's Note: The following feature sheds some light on the murky topic of the government's CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) standards and how that whole accounting system may significantly impact each of us. Frank Sargeant, editor of The Fishing Wire (www.thefishingwire.com) has more on a standard will have more than a casual impact on any of us who tow trailers of any sort.]*

Finding a tow vehicle capable of pulling a larger boat may become more of a challenge by 2021 because of new federal fuel economy standards announced recently.

The recent announcement from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the EPA of a 54.5 required mpg average for cars and trucks to be sold in the U.S. by 2025 is good news for environmentalists but could be bad news for boaters-especially those who enjoy anything larger than a canoe or kayak. Tow vehicles capable of pulling even aluminum bass boats that get that kind of mileage do not exist-and possibly never will.

Many who are environmentalists are also boaters-I like to think of myself as both. In fact, bottom line, all of us

have to be environmentalists if we want to keep breathing. But practical environmentalists-often those two words don't go together in today's America.

It's true that past increases in mileage requirements have for the most part not caused the problems with towing larger boats that many of us expected-because manufacturers are allowed to make some vehicles that do not meet the standards if they produce enough that do, there are still some big V8 trucks around that can handle towing larger boats-and plenty of V6's capable of pulling the typical bass or walleye boat, or a flats or bay boat, and still getting 20 mpg highway or better when the boat is left at home.

The reason those trucks are still allowed is the federal CAFE standard; Corporate Average Fuel Economy allows a limited number of higher-torque, lower mpg vehicles for each company if the average of all the vehicles they sell meets the standard. And it's not a simple average, either. Ford, for example, still sells more pickups than anything else and under the Byzantine accounting system allowed by the program, can meet the standard. The average MPG for a company can be

adjusted depending on the "footprint" of vehicles of which they already sell the most.

Even most freshwater boats require a V6 truck for efficient towing--and buying these vehicles may become more difficult and more expensive due to new regs.

Don't ask me how this works-I'm guessing it was figured out by a couple hundred auto-industry lobbyists, bureaucrats and legislators on a junket to Bali. In any case, it has allowed continued sales of pickups and SUV's in considerable numbers in the past-and real average mpg has continued to increase. The CAFE standard for 2011 to 2016 peaks at 35.5 mpg-and plenty of cars already do better than that, at least on paper.

But there's a limit, given current technology. It's possible that auto-makers may find ways to wring more mpg's out of gasoline engines or hybrid gas and electric vehicles. It's possible that batteries may get so much better that electric vehicles will finally become truly practical-but they're no where near there yet for anything other than short-haul city vehicles.

Yes, you can buy a Chevy Volt to tool around town in and not spend \$5 on gas in a month-but if you have to make a trip to grandma's in Omaha, you're going to be putting gas in it all the way. For those of us who live in rural areas, electric cars in



Jael Williams of Bronte (left) and Peyton Arrott of Abilene caught these Speckled Trout at Port O'Connor, Texas, in August 2012.

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